Shenandoah National Park Education Program
Teaching Out-Of-Doors

Why use the outdoors?

- Teaching out-of-doors supplements classroom/textbook instruction with a hands-on, sensory based experiences.
- It provides an opportunity to help children develop an awareness and appreciation of the natural world.
- It's fun!

Basics of Outdoor Teaching

1. Teach attitudes, not just facts. Stress the larger concepts rather than just the names of things and specific facts. Example: It is more important to know the different roles, helpful or harmful, that insects play in the environment than just that insects have six legs, 3 main body parts, and 2 antennae.
2. Explore together. You don't need to know all the answers. If you don't know the answer to a question, use the opportunity to learn with the students. Often, it is more productive if you let the students discover the answer for themselves (even if you don't know the answer).
3. Use the senses. Students are more likely to remember if their senses are involved in the learning process.
4. Be flexible. Use "teachable moments" when they come up.
   Example: Imagine that you are trying to teach the class about stream ecology when a deer comes to the stream for a drink. Do you ignore the deer? How do you tie the deer into your lesson?
5. Plan your field trip thoroughly.
6. Keep your class under control. Safety comes first! Know the rules and regulations at the field trip location. Let your students and chaperones know before the trip what you expect of them.

An important point to remember:

A child that asks "What's that?" is usually looking for more information, not just a label or name. The same is true of you, too. Think about this scene: you're sitting at home alone, reading. The house is quiet. Suddenly you hear a rustling sound, like dried leaves, then a high pitched squeal over a clatter of metal. You jump up in fright, gasping, "What's that?" Are you really asking for the scientific name of the creature lurking near your house? Or are you asking for more specific information to piece together, leading to a logical conclusion: it's only the neighbor's cat tipping over the trash can.

Adapted from:
E. Sisson, Nature with Children of All Ages, The Massachusetts Audubon Society, Prentice Hall Press

J. Horsfall, "How to Teach Effectively When You Don't Know the Answers", Play Lightly on the Earth. Dawn Publications, Nevada City, CA.